

Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board
Recommendations from the March 11, 2011 Board Meeting
Phoenix, Arizona

1. Recommend the following edits to the Wild Horse and Burro Strategy:

Sustainable Herds Goal:

The Advisory Board recommends that this be included at the end of the Goal for Sustainable Herds: in balance with society's ability to absorb the excess annual increase.

Manage wild horse and burro (WH&B) populations on public lands so that healthy rangelands and animals are maintained in a thriving natural ecological balance with other multiple uses in balance with society's ability to absorb the excess annual increase.

Objective 1; Action 1: Beginning in FY 2012 through FY 2014, remove an estimated 7,600 excess animals per year to temporarily hold population size at approximately 32,000 to 36,000 animals on the range. Prioritize gathers in areas where overpopulation most threatens land health, animal welfare, and public health and safety.

The Advisory Board Recommends the Secretary follow the mandate for multiple uses under law for healthy rangelands and with regard to budget constraints, the Secretary should include contingency budget adjustments as part of the strategy in order to attain healthy rangelands.

Objective 1; Action 2: Change wording to read:

Continue adjustments to AML through the land use planning process.

Objective 2; Use a wide range of fertility control and other population control measures to slow herd growth rates and better align the number of excess WH&B which need to be removed with the number of animals that can be placed in private care.

The Advisory Board recommends that the BLM assure continued ongoing research to measure the effectiveness, safety, and impacts of treatments on herd dynamics.

Objective 3; Action 2; Change wording to read:

Identify opportunities to mitigate impacts between WH&B and other authorized activities on public lands.

Objective 4; Action 1; Change wording to read:

Implement bait and water trapping gather techniques wherever possible to preserve band integrity.

Ecotourism

The Advisory Board recommends that the BLM promote ecotourism where appropriate, and in ways that are not invasive to the WH&B.

Pastures and Partnership Sanctuaries Goal: Change wording to read:

Long-term goal is to reduce the need for placement of unadoptable WH&B and in the interim, provide for sustainable long-term care of excess, unadopted WH&B in the most cost-effective manner in long term pastures or partnership sanctuaries.

Place Excess Animals in Private Care

Objective 1; Action 4: Change wording to read:

Encourage and consider more store fronts (privatized adoption facilities that can offer untrained and/or trained wild horses for adoption for the BLM such as fostering volunteers, Trainer Incentive Program trainers, and others).

Objective 2; Action 5; Add:

Consider semi-privatization of the adoption program for underperforming in-house adoptions.

Animal Welfare Goal: Change wording to read:

Use a progressive approach to implement a Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program (CAWP). Develop and implement a CAWP to ensure the well-being of animals at gathers, in facilities, and on the range along with healthy ecosystems. The CAWP will bring together a progression of new components such as education for employees, volunteers, and contractors; an ongoing, internal animal welfare assessment program; and periodic external reviews of our animal care and handling. Conduct the CAWP with complete transparency.

Copy and paste Objective 5; Action 3: from Sustainable Herds into this section. Add new Action.

Objective 1; Action 8: Monitor body condition and forage and water availability to evaluate herd health. When conditions require, take appropriate action to protect the health of wild horses and burros and the land they depend on for habitat.

Objective 3; Change wording to read:

Provide a continuing education program on animal care and handling for employees, volunteers, and contractors with an emphasis on natural horsemanship.

Science and Research:

Objective 1; Action 1: Change wording to read:

Continue research on fertility control and other topics.

Objective 2; Add new action

Objective 2; Action 4: Review the science behind rangeland monitoring and AML development.

Public Outreach Goal: Change wording to read:

Utilize effective communications to build the public's confidence and trust for the BLM's management of the WH&B Program with increased transparency.

The Advisory Board recommends that the BLM include a robust communication plan with the public on the strategy and on ongoing WH&B program efforts.

Objective 2; Action 3: Change wording to read:

Update Website information on a regular basis, including updated videos and photographs of all phases of BLM's WH&B handling and management.

Objective 3; Action 2: Host an annual or periodic media and public tour of wild horses in long-term pastures.

The Advisory Board recommends that the BLM look at the possibility of having public access to long-term holding facilities.

Change Objective 3; Action 2 to Action 3.

New Objective 3; Action 2: Include communications section to include internal communications such as DOI/BLM consistency and coordination.

Umbrella Recommendation for the Strategy:

Provide transparency in the public comment and response process - Provide a feedback loop – summarizing what was heard and how the comments were addressed.

BLM's Response: The BLM is considering the comments from the Advisory Board along with all other comments received on the Proposed Strategy. The BLM will post the Strategy at www.blm.gov once it has been accepted by Congress.

2. Recommend the BLM fully fund the Mustang Heritage Foundation (MHF):

BLM's Response: The BLM accepts this recommendation to fully fund the MHF to adopt the number of horses upon which the BLM and the MHF agree. The partnership between the BLM and the MHF benefits the horses and the taxpayers. In 2012, the MHF is funded to adopted 2,000 animals. As it is with all agreements, this agreement is subject to funding and to constraints by Continuing Resolutions.

3. Recommend the BLM compile the Fiscal Year annual report on injuries and mortalities associated with gathers, transportation, short- and long-term holding, and adoption option.

BLM's Response: The BLM accepts this recommendation. The BLM will begin annual reporting of mortalities, including a breakout showing those caused by acute injury. This report will include mortalities that occur at gathers, while horses are in transit or at short-term holding or long-term pasture facilities and adoption events. The data will be extracted from the Wild Horse and Burro Program Information System (WHBPS) and from the current gather reports supplied to the National Program Office following each gather. The data will be cross classified by State and the location at which the death occurred (gather, in-transit, short-term holding, long-term holding, adoption).

4. Recommend the Secretary consider including members on the National Advisory Board as liaisons to the strategy implementation.

BLM's Response: The BLM is seeking guidance and direction on this recommendation under Federal Advisory Committee Act.

5. Recommend the Secretary review all public comments prior to finalizing the strategy and taking it to Congress.

BLM's Response: The BLM accepts this recommendation. The BLM received approximately 9,000 comment letters and e-mails on the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Strategy Development document. The comment period was open from June 3 to September 3, 2010. All comments were reviewed and were instrumental in identifying issues and improving the BLM's strategy.

A detailed Proposed Strategy was then posted on the BLM website on February 28, 2011. The public was invited to review and provide comments to the BLM on this strategy through March 30, 2011. The BLM received about 43,000 comments. The majority of comments concerned the Sustainable Herd Section of the Proposed Strategy. All comments were reviewed in preparing the current draft of the Wild Horse and Burro Strategy, which will be submitted to Congress as part of a Report to Congress. The BLM plans to post on the BLM website the approximately 43,000 comments from the February 24-March 30, 2011 public comment period, once the Strategy has been accepted by Congress.

6. Recommend the BLM adopt a scientific integrity plan.

BLM's Response: The BLM accepts this recommendation. However, as the Department of Interior already has a Department Manual (Part 305 Chapter 3) in place that outlines the scientific integrity policy, no bureau level action is needed. In addition, the BLM has a designated Scientific Integrity Officer.

7. Recommend the BLM develop a centralized process for volunteer offers, tracking and responding. Recommend a centralized specific mechanism for contacts.

BLM's Response: The BLM does not accept this recommendation due to the existence of a centralized database and system/program for volunteering with federal land management agencies that includes the BLM, and a lack of internal capacity to track individual requests. Opportunities to volunteer with BLM are posted at the national website www.volunteer.gov, which is linked to www.blm.gov. Outstanding volunteers and their contributions are highlighted through a variety of award and recognition programs sponsored by the agencies.